

ALL
THAT
I AM



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ALL THAT I AM has been funded by a grant
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It was first performed by Roberta Nobleman
in St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Indianapolis, Indiana.

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ALL THAT I AM

By Irene Mahoney, O.S.U.

*"I am the part that I must play, I am the journey I must go,
All that I am I must endure, and bear the burden of my years
Of good and evil, time and place, before the story all is told"*

Ursuline

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For Roberta

who understands

the words —

and the silences.

ALL THAT I AM is a play about those who have always come second in the Church--the unnamed, the unsung, the unmentioned: the church secretaries, the middle-aged assistant to the 'chief-priest,' the black cleaning woman at the cathedral, the Episcopal pastor's wife.

"Attention must be paid to such a person," says Willie Loman's wife, Linda, in DEATH OF A SALESMAN. "What about me?" asks St. Peter's wife in the Epilogue to ALL THAT I AM. "God has no favorites," St. Peter declares; but the Church sometimes does and designates masks for women to wear.

Underneath the Mistress (the sex object), the Wife (the weaker vessel), the Mother (redeemed only by child-bearing), the Fiancée (the innocent virgin) lies a flesh and blood person. Who is she? What is her story?

ALL THAT I AM examines the forgotten women behind five well-known churchmen, bringing under scrutiny responses in the history of the Church that have been repressed, denied, fantasized--but mostly just forgotten.

We know from the Gospels that St. Peter had a wife; but who she was has been lost beneath the importance of her husband. We read in the CONFESSIONS that Augustine had a mistress but she is left nameless--only an allusion on a page. For years Roman Catholics have accepted celibacy as a sine qua non of the clerical state, unaware that for hundreds of years it had been a moot issue, strongly enforced only in the twelfth century--with bitter suffering for both men and women, as we see in the story of Hilde.

Even in such a love-match as that between John Donne and his wife Anne, motherhood was an inescapable obligation over which the woman had no control. Only in the late twentieth century are Anne Donne's dreams of equality for her daughters beginning to be realized. With Maria von Wedemeyer we are given a glimpse of true virginity--a virginity far from the images of artificial modesty and dependence so often associated with the Bride. Here virginity is seen in its truest aspect: integral, candid, strong.

Such stories need to be heard because they touch the heart of the feminine. These women are not victims or even simply survivors; they are persons who are alive and well and full of hope, in spite of it all.

ALL THAT I AM is a play which presents questions not answers. It is our hope that it will aid us to reposition ourselves, as in compassion and sincerity we continue our search.

Love Maureen. R.

Robert Noblema

PROLOGUE: SIMON PETER'S WIFE

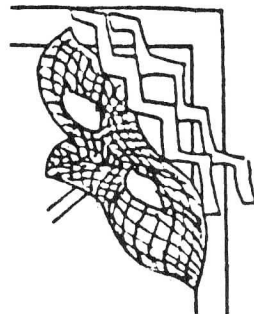
The Gospels do not provide her with a name and it is perhaps appropriate that she be known to us only as Simon Peter's Wife.

She is basically a cockney fishwife: candid, direct and feisty. She expects the world to be predictable and while she does not expect a high place in it, she does expect the status quo to remain just that.

She is an act-er rather than a reflect-er, a bustling person who asserts herself by mopping and sweeping and keeping her children in order.

She is not a demanding woman. She has been content until now with her fisherman-husband and her two children and the life of the village. Her marriage is a practical affair yet she loves her husband and expects his fidelity in return. Simon's sudden "vocation" turns her world upside down. She sees herself losing the only world she understands--and she responds with anger. Despite her aggressive style she is basically a shy woman of limited experience who is bewildered when confronted with what to her is incomprehensible. And yet it is she who asks the pivotal question which all the characters share.

Simon Peter's Wife provides both prologue and epilogue, preparing the stage for the other four women and setting their stories in perspective.



No, Ephrem, I don't know when your father will be home. Stop whining; you're not going to starve. Take a piece of bread; that will keep you going till he comes.

Ephrem! Come here and take these sticks off the floor; can't you see I'm trying to mop? I know it's your new game but you'll have to put it away for now. Look, be a good boy and go find your sister and take the water jar down to the well and fill it. No, not the big one; that's too heavy for you. Take the little one, the one by the door. And on the way stop and see if your Uncle Andrew is home yet.

It's enough to drive me crazy and that's the truth! Two days and not a word. And the same with Andrew, Anna says. And then when he does come he's like a crazy man: the Master said this and the Healer said that. He acts as though he'd seen the sun dancing in the sky. And when I ask him where's the fish for supper, he gives me some cockamamie story about being a fisher of men.

Last night I lay in bed with Ephrem curled up around me and Lea next to him--and no man on the other side. And I thought of Anna, lying with her two girls waiting for Andrew--and no man in that house either. He was a good provider, Simon was and Andrew, too, and now we never know

what we'll eat or when. Anna says we worry too much, that it's just a phase they're going through. . . but I don't know. . . I'll tell you this: if he comes home again today with empty baskets and no fish, he'll be a sorry man--a very sorry man!

So there you are! And about time, too. My God, the man is soaking wet! Don't come in here dripping like that. Can't you see I'm trying to tidy up the floor? What's happened to you? You look half-drowned. You WHAT? You were walking on the water! For God's sake, Simon, don't say that in front of the children. Isn't it bad enough to have you wandering about like some vagrant without talking crazy to boot? I don't want to hear about it! That's the end of it! "I've been walking on the water!" How come, Mr. Miracle Worker, you're so wet, if you've been walking on the water? Simon, I tell you I've heard enough. Go and find a dry robe to put on. Simon! For God's sake don't walk right in the middle where I've just finished; walk around the side.

Don't call you what? Your name is Peter now? And I suppose you're not my husband and you don't have two children and you're some bloody miracle-worker! Is that it? Well, thank you very much but you're Simon to me and Simon you'll go on being. Simon the Stupid if you ask me. Don't tell me to be quiet. I'll be quiet when you come home and be my husband again. Go change your clothes before the children get back. They're too young to know they've got a crazy father.

Well, that's the way it was, all that year and most of the next. I didn't know which was worse: when he was away or when he was home. There were stories of blind men seeing and lame men walking. There was the story of a little girl, just Lea's age, brought back from the dead--lifted right up from her bier and put back in her father's arms. Wonderwork upon wonderwork! "And then," he would say, his eyes shining and his hands out before him trying to show me what he'd seen "and then the demon left him, right out of him it went
. . and the boy was well again"

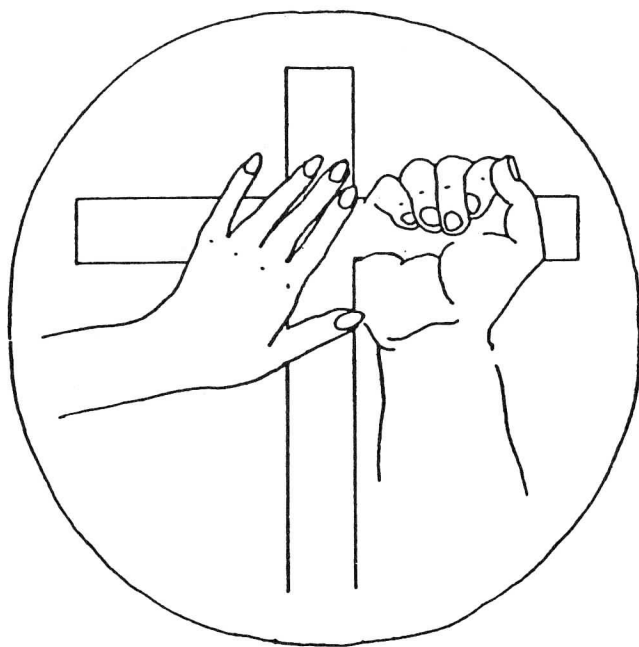
If it had been all wonderworks it wouldn't have frightened me so much. We'd had healers before, strutting their powers for a day or two, then off to some other town. They drew the crowd but when the magic stopped, they were soon forgotten. This was something else. I knew it and it frightened me. Something had touched my Simon and was calling him away.

I knew it for certain the day the Master came. He came in over there. The door is low and he had to bend his head. I had just picked up the water jar, the big one, to take down to the well. Simon kept making motions for me to put it down and greet the Master; but I felt awkward--and mad, too, that Simon had brought him without warning. We aren't used to having strangers in our house.

My mother had been sick. She was lying just there, so I could watch her while I worked. At first she'd been delirious but then the fever had made her too weak to move. Simon brought the Master to her side and he reached out to touch her. Well, I don't have to tell you that she recovered. Everyone knows that. It's written in the Gospels.

He stayed a while and had some bread with us. I was dizzy with it all, like a bird in a whirlwind, swirling round and round in terror. I was losing Simon. That was all I knew. It would be nice, all things considered, if I could say I felt a holy joy. Not me! Some other wife of some other man, maybe. Not me! There was a terrible anger in me then, while Simon grew a foot a day with the wonder and the power of it all. He would work miracles himself! The Master had told him so--he would pick up vipers and not be harmed, drink poison and not die. He would preach and teach and heal. (And what of me?) He would journey from place to place telling of the kingdom of God. (And what of me?) And when that kingdom came he would have one of the highest places. (And what of me?)

What dreams he had. Poor Simon. . . What dreams they all had. Fine dreams they were. . . dreams to stretch out to and make them something grand. But what of us? That girl from Carthage Augustine took as mistress? Hilde from St. Bremer, the cast-off priest's wife? Little Anne Donne, heavy with John Donne's seed her whole life long? And Maria, promised to Pastor Bonhoeffer, and losing him to martyrdom. Dreams and visions. . . dreams and visions. . . and the steady stuff of love.



AUGUSTINE'S MISTRESS

Of Augustine's mistress we know very little. She heads the "Nameless Ones"--those women kept in back rooms or back streets, identified not by name but by coarse epithets; but who in fact understand love and reality better than the men who "keep" them.

She is mentioned only fleetingly in THE CONFESSIONS. We know that she and Augustine lived together for seventeen years, that they had a son, and that at the end of this period Augustine, planning his "conversion" and a more profitable marriage (arranged by his mother Monica), sent his "woman" back to Carthage, keeping his son with him.

Legend suggests that the Mistress entered a sisterhood, made a vow of chastity and lived out a quiet life.

The woman we see here follows the legend.

She is a person of simple directness with the wisdom that springs from simplicity. Despite the disappointment of her life she sees things whole and in harmony. She lacks the irony with which Simon Peter's wife views the world even as she acknowledges the tragedy of it. Yet the Mistress is a realist in her own right, even understanding the reason she is relegated to anonymity.

THE MISTRESS

Forgive me! I did not mean to be unmannerly. We--the sisters, that is, pride themselves on hospitality. I should have offered you some fruit, some grapes, perhaps, to quench your thirst. They are in season now.

(She plays with a piece of pottery)

My mind is all astray. It wanders off sickly, to where it has no right to be. You see. . . the news. . . I heard the news only today. A gentleman who stopped for water and a little rest. . . I brought him bread and fruit and a little wine. I asked him--to be pleasant--if he traveled far. He said he'd been on the way two days already but still had far to go before reaching Hippo Regius. Had he family there? I asked. He was a youngish man well-formed, and gentle in his manner. He looked at me and smiled. "I go to be a monk," he said. "There is near Hippo a new monastery."

Then before I caught myself the word slipped out, "Augustine's."

He looked up startled from his bread. "Yes," he said, "Augustine's." And when I did not speak, he looked at me more keenly. "You know Augustine?" he asked. My tongue was heavy in my mouth and when I said, "The name becomes well-known here in Carthage," the words were blurred like those of someone whose tongue is tied.

He nodded and went on. "Last year I thought of going to join him in Tagaste but then I heard sorrow had darkened him. He'd lost his dearest friend; then his son had died, a young man on whom they said he'd set his hopes."

It was then I dropped the dish, the cherries scattering across the floor. My son was dead! My son, Adeodatus, as Augustine called him, gift of God. The gentleman thought I knelt to gather up the pieces of the dish; in fact, it was because I could not hold myself together. I knelt there for a moment, my hands cold against the stone, quieting my heart. Then one by one I picked the cherries up and the pieces of the bowl, and stood upright.

"You've cut your hand," he said. I looked and there I saw a drop of blood and wondered how it was that but a single drop appeared when I felt all my heart's blood draining out. I put my finger to my lips and tried to smile. "I'll bring your Excellency more fruit," I offered but he shook his head.

"Don't trouble," he said, "I must be on my way. God bless you for your kindness. I will remember you; and you, perhaps, will pray for me that Augustine will welcome me into his company."

That was just a little after noon. The hours have slipped away.

(She picks up the pieces of the bowl, squinting at them professionally.)

I made this bowl. I make all the vessels that we use--it is my household task. But it is broken now. I took it to my shed where I keep my clay and tried to piece it back together; but I could not make the pieces stick. A vessel I had made--shaped and held--and now clean broken through. My little bowl that bore the fruit of so much promise.

This year he would be seventeen. The age I was when I conceived him. I had been with Augustine just a year by then. He had come to Carthage for his studies. Whatever he would say against it later (perhaps you've heard these things?) at seventeen he found in Carthage the city of his dreams. When he was older and seeking after Wisdom (as he called it) he would rave, "It was all sin, all sin those years in Carthage, a foul cesspool in which I wallowed." But then it was not sin to him but life. He drank it like a bedouin come from the desert, his hands greedy on the jug that held the water. He drank it all: the lectures, contests, games, theaters and music, the brawling and the jostling in the streets. . . the pleasures of the body. Later he railed against them all and most against himself for his hot lust. Sometimes I think he drew his sins far blacker than they were. Men need to boast, I know; what woman would deny them that? And Augustine had a greater need than most. A greater need in everything. I knew that from the first.

We met in church. I was the Christian, then. I watched him at the service. He was awkward, turning restlessly, as though it were all new to him. After, he stood next to me, smiling. "You are a Christian, too," I said. "Not yet," he laughed. "Not yet, although it is what my mother most desires." "But," I said, "you must desire it too, else why come here?" He laughed and leaned against me. "You are what I most desire."

He was used to having what he wanted and he had so much to help him in his suit: his eloquence, a passionate young body, and such a love to love (it was his phrase). So, we began to love. But I must tell you this: I was no street girl--then or ever--I do not mean to make excuse but I would have you know our love was love. I loved him as my everything and he loved me--but as men love women, as one thing among many.

At first our bodies were the only tongues we needed. They said everything--or so we thought. Then little by little he would practice his eloquence on me--declaim his speeches, read from the poetry he read in school. Practice to make me laugh or cry, arouse my anger or excite desire. And he was good at all.

One summer afternoon as I was dozing in the heat, he burst through the door. "I've found the most wonderful of all the poets," he cried and began to read to me from Publius Virgilius Maro--the one they call Virgil. "Listen," he cried, "Listen!" And he read to me how Aeneas came to Carthage--our very city--and met Queen Dido. He read how in a storm Dido and Aeneas took shelter in a cave and there made love. How passion far outstripped reason, making Dido dream that they would be together forever and forever. He stopped there, his eyes shining with the splendor of the language and I sat dreaming--dreaming Dido's dream. Then, as he was taught, he pitched his voice deeper in his throat and slowed his tempo the better to declaim the lines of anger and despair. For now the gods reminded Aeneas of his goal, commanded that he wake from love, set sail for Latium and found a kingdom there. Now Dido, abandoned and betrayed, wept and stumbled in her palace, gave orders to prepare her pyre as she rehearsed her death.

Here Augustine stopped again. Together we sighed and wept for hapless Dido. But those were theater tears, sweet tears aroused by poetry. The bitter tears of that most bitter parting I would not understand until the day when, flanked by Monica his mother and our own son, Augustine turned his back on me and sent me home from Italy to Carthage.

You see, the happiness we shared was not enough for him. He always dreamed of greatness. Whatever was, was never quite enough. Something always lured him on.

It was not only money and a reputation that drove him on. "I must find wisdom," he would say. "A man is made for wisdom." And he would sniff it here and there, stretching in all directions, like a camel scenting water in the desert.

Wisdom! That was his daytime language with his friends. But at night he spoke a different tongue with me. Our bodies spoke. We were comfort, strength, self-giving love to one another. It was not lust. Whatever he said later, it was not lust! I had no doubt of that. Nor had he in the moon's light. But when the sun rose. . . then in the daylight his man's reason sprung awake and he was off and seeking wisdom--or what he called wisdom.

It is not woman's place to argue with a man but in my heart I did not call it wisdom. Wisdom, I think, brings peace and harmony. It takes the pieces of our lives--the smooth, the jagged, the small, the large, heavy and light--and fits them all together. As God has made the world: water and dry land, moon and sun, deserts and wooded mountains--fitting them together in a whole. It is not that the water parts are bad and the dry land good. The world has need of all--or so it seems to me. And so with us, the body needs the soul and the soul, the body. Things of matter are not evil.

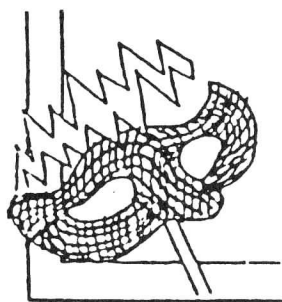
Yet sometimes Augustine rose in anguish in the morning, looking with such contempt upon his organ that I sometimes feared he would make himself a eunuch. It was a foolish fear, I can tell you--there were no eunuch-thoughts in him at night! But in the morning I was Eve again, my body the lure that snared his soul in sin. He raged against his weakness and my flesh. Once I dared to say that God himself had given Eve to Adam for his need. But he replied (it's hard to think so bright a man would say a thing so foolish!) he replied that God would have done better to have given him another man for his companion.

By that time at Milan our house was full. Monica had joined us with her other son and two young nephews, and Augustine had his friends. It was a household in which I had no part and I knew that Dido's doom was soon to fall on me. Even so, the night he told me, I had no barrier against my grief. "You must go back to Carthage," he said. Adeodatus would remain with him. It was better so. A young boy needs a father. "And a mother, too," I almost cried.

Forgive me. I have no right to bitterness. I was his concubine. Just that. I understand all that and that it was better for him so. But, you see, I love him.

So we parted after sixteen years. Like Dido, I had a death to die and he needed to be free to found his kingdom--whatever that will be. And now the child we fashioned is dead. I see him as he stood the day I left. Lean like his father but straighter and not so dark. When I was working on my bowl this afternoon, I dreamed that Augustine and I met at Adeodatus' grave. We comforted each other for our loss, telling stories of his childhood as people do at death. But I must manage grief alone. Will you pray for him, our Adeodatus, our gift of God? And for his father? That he will find wisdom at the end and harmony, the harmony that sees things whole and not as warring members in our body. Thank you. And pray for me that I will be as God wishes.

Pardon me? My name? You see, I hesitate. I hesitate because Augustine told me when I left that he would never use my name--that thus he would protect me. Perhaps. But sometimes when my thoughts are dark, I think there might have been another reason for wishing anonymity for me. Nameless ones are easiest forgotten. Think about it. I think you'll find it's true.



HILDE OF ST. BREMAR

Hilde is in a sense a fictional character. History does not identify her specifically; rather she represents those countless, unnamed women whose lives were shattered when by the Lateran Councils of the twelfth century--after centuries of ineffectual effort--clerical celibacy began to be rigidly enforced by the Church.

Hilde is a shrewd, intelligent realist. She lacks the sensitivity of Augustine's Mistress or the volatile temper of Simon Peter's Wife but of all the characters she is the most realistic and the most resourceful. Her bitterness is quiet rather than explosive, less for herself than for her husband. What will happen to him? she asks. She herself will survive; she knows it. She has never expected very much from that world of lords and bishops which rules her life.

She has borne five children: two still-born sons, two daughters dying as infants. The surviving daughter, Alyce, is a lay sister at St. Lazare, a hospice run by nuns some miles away. It is here that Hilde plans to go. After years of marriage she must now prepare to separate from her husband in obedience to the latest decree from Rome which has invalidated all such marriages and which, even more tragically, has destroyed the love which she and her husband had shared.

THE WIFE

I'm sorry, Clothilde, that's the last of the thread. I should have spun some more. Put the shirt aside, I'll have to take care of it later. I know, it's badly worn around the elbows. I wouldn't bother but I want to leave things in good trim for him. God only knows when they'll get mended again. Not by himself, you can be sure. He couldn't tell a needle from a pick.

No, I don't mind talking about it. Everybody is. But what's the point; there's nothing to be done. The decree's writ clear. Oh, I know, I know; it makes no sense. It comes to the same thing in the end. "It is a decree from Rome; all Christians must obey the Pope." So finis to all argument.

What does Rome know of St. Bremar? Who has seen our village or understands how we live? The Pope? Not he! Sending his grand proclamation into our muddy lanes: "Let each priest put aside his wife and live in holy purity. And should he fail to do so, then let the people absent themselves from every service he performs that he may be brought to his senses by the world's contempt." So there it is: we separate or Roger can no longer be a priest.

Twenty years we've lived here in these rooms. I bore five children in this house and each time nearly died. Two boys still-born and two little girls buried before they had begun to walk or speak.

Only Alyce is left to us and she has gone to help the nuns at St. Lazare. I'm glad now that they're dead, now that Rome has made wives prostitutes and children bastards. The stigma will not reach them where they are. They must be condemned, it's said, for they are the fruit of our life of sin. It has not seemed much like a life of sin. I would have thought a life of sin would be more pleasurable. But the great lords say it is a life of sin, so it must be so.

Were you here last year, Clothilde, when those two young men from Dijon came through the town on their way home from the wars? Yes, that's right; one had lost an arm and the other had a gimp leg. Did you hear them tell of Rome? No, maybe not. Perhaps it was later that night. We gave them hospitality--put them in our bed, as I recall. In Rome, they said, the Pope and his lords live in a great palace. Like our manor house? I asked. And they just laughed. "Your manor house," they said, "is like a pigsty to the papal palace." And inside everything is gold and silver--no, no, they didn't get inside, two country soldiers. . . who would let them in? No, people told them. And I will tell you something else they said: the women who clean and wash and keep the palace are the cast-off wives of priests, bound in servitude until they die. And in the fields, the serfs who work the land are priests' children, stripped of their freedom and their rights. I'm glad our sons are dead. God must be more merciful--and just--than that.

Where will I go? To St. Lazare with Alyce. They always need one more to tend the sick and I am still strong and able and good with herbs. It's a useful way to live. It's him, Roger, I worry for. I look around and try to think how he will live without me. Oh, not just for the bed; his passion's wearing out. That is not marriage. I worry for the tenderness and caring. I worry for the warmth my body gives him on a winter night. I worry for the food he'll eat and who will

wash and mend the linens for the altar. What will he do when he comes home at night, from a death bed or from a hard birth where the baby comes still-born? Who will talk to him then or listen while he talks? Who will have the fire going on a cold night or help him to bed when he has drunk too much? How shall he endure the loneliness?

Oh, I know, that's what they recommend: that priests should live together, sharing a common dwelling, supporting each other in their work and in their loneliness of life. Perhaps it works in cities, in cathedral towns, I don't know. After all, they are not monks, so why should they follow a monkish life. But here in St. Breemar? Shall he walk five miles to share a bed with another priest? They do not know in Rome how the priest must live here.

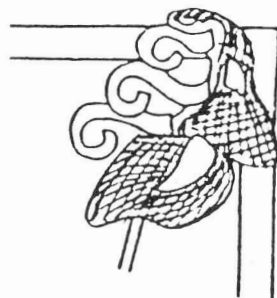
You let me talk too much. No, it's true. I can't say this to him. We hardly talk now anymore. It's bad between us now. At first there was just sadness and anger--and bewilderment at what would happen to us both. Then two weeks ago the preacher came. Roger, of course, offered him to spend the night with us but he would have none of it--not after he saw there was a woman in the house. I should have known then how the preaching would go.

There I sat while he called women whores, toys of the devil, evil daughters of evil Eve, temptresses and seducers unto sin. He used words I had never heard and described acts I had never imagined. "Carnal sin! Carnal sin!" He screamed it at us till there was spittle on his chin and I feared he might fall into a fit. For each second of impurity, he warned, there would be a thousand years of burning fire, salting through the flesh. He who was now aflame with lust will burn in fire forever. And how, he asked, how dares a priest to touch the host who is guilty of having touched a woman?

When it was over, I walked home ahead of Roger and had a cup of warm milk waiting for him when he came. He drank it and got into bed. He slept away from me and I lay on my back sick with shame and anger. After a while I fell asleep but when I woke the bed was empty. I felt a draft and saw the door was ajar. I got up and pushed it open. Roger stood there in the cold, naked but for his kirtle. I came behind him and put my hand on his arm to comfort him--and he turned upon me like an animal.

In all the years we'd lived together I had never felt that brute uncaring force of lust. It lasted but a moment and then he threw me from him. I hit my head against the door and for a moment I lay there stunned. But Roger never moved: I got to my feet and went back to my bed. Later, he came back in--but not to bed. He lay on the trestle table until morning. That day we had no Mass. He sent me to the church to say the priest was ill.

And so our marriage ends. We do not talk now. I fix his food. He eats and attends to his duties. On Friday I will take my clothes and walk to St. Lazare, leaving my husband to be celibate.



MISTRESS ANNE DONNE

In 1599 John Donne, then an unknown scribbler, a young man with pretensions to court and a reputation as something of a rake, saw Anne More at her uncle's home in London and fell conclusively in love. He was twenty-seven; she was not quite fifteen. Two years later, despite strong parental opposition, they were married.

During their fifteen years of marriage, John acquired a reputation as a poet, rose to significance as an Anglican priest, and was awarded the prestigious post of King's Chaplain. Anne, meanwhile, played out her role as mother, bearing twelve children and dying in childbirth at the age of thirty-three.

The girl John married was quick and bright and winsome; she reminded him of sunlight. But the Anne we meet here is in her final pregnancy and while her quick intelligence is still at work she is depleted by years of ceaseless mothering.

Despite her fatigue, however, we still find traces of that fire and life which had originally drawn John to her. Of all the characters it is Anne who not only questions her own circumscribed life but who is able to dream of a different life for her daughters--a life in which they will be free to make choices and decisions and claim their lives as their own.

the mother

(As Anne comes on stage, she is finishing an argument with John before turning to the audience.)

No, John, no! There's no point talking any more. I cannot go and that is final!

He's made plans, he says. Of course; I know that. I'd made plans too but plans must sometimes be remade. "The carriage is ordered and the first pew reserved for you," he says. Well, then, the carriage must be cancelled and the first pew given to someone else.

You see, he was so set on having us come to his preaching today. He was only chosen Divinity Reader at Lincoln's Inn in October. It's a great honor and he still wears it like a new cloak--strutting a little, you know, and wanting the world to notice how fine he is. He would have taken pride to have the first pew filled by his wife and seven children. And I, too, would have been proud to acknowledge that it was my husband who stood before the congregation preaching the word of God.

But we cannot go--and there's an end of it. Bridget's been sick all week and now Margaret has come down with fever. I fear for Baby, too. Her little face was hot against my breast when I was nursing her.

John tells me to leave Constance home with nurse so that I can go with the other children. She's a good girl, Constance is, and a great help to me. But she's only fourteen, too young and inexperienced. Should something happen, how could I forgive myself? I told John this but he shakes his head and says I make too much of little sicknesses.

Perhaps I do. 'Tis a mother's way--a way that John will never understand with all his learning and theology. He cannot know that fear--cold as mortal illness--that grips me when I hold a sick child in my arms. I've seen how stealthily death creeps upon the lives of children. I've lost three already. John grieves, of course, but not as I grieve. There's a bonding between child and mother, a bonding of body to body. How could it not be so? That bonding I have felt eleven times. Yes, married sixteen years and I have carried a child eleven times. I have held and nurtured each tiny seed for nine full months. And now I am with child again.

I have not yet told John. I don't know why. The time seems never to be right. He's busy so much these days planning sermons, laboring over texts and interpretations that he does not brook interruptions lightly. And at night I am so weary I do not want to talk. I think I have never been so tired before. Each day tests my strength. Something does not go well with me this time. It's as though my body had no more to give, as though I had no more strength to nurture one more life. I cannot easily talk about these things with John. It frightens him, I think, and he protects himself by not hearing what I say.

Oh, it is not that he doesn't love me. He says he loves me more than ever he thought possible and has from the moment when he first saw me in my uncle's house. He still remembers how I was standing--I was but fifteen--against a large window with the sun shining like a halo on my hair. At that moment, he says, he fell in love with me forever. And I believe him.

But there are times when I wonder who it is he loves. Is it the Anne I am or the image he has shaped of me: Anne bright and quick, gentle Anne, Anne ready to his service--for love or what he wills. Anne who mothers everyone: George, Lucy, Constance, even John himself--and finds such mothering everything. This Anne he loves. But the other Anne who sometimes wearies of it all, who longs herself for mothering--this Anne I think he keeps outside his door, not meeting his requirements.

One time--we had but three children then--John left me to travel with a lord for whom he filled the post of secretary. I was with child when he left. I knew he had to go; his salary--small though it was--was all we had to live on. And yet when we said goodbye a fear that turned my womb to ice made me tremble in his arms. Yet he never felt the tremor. He kissed me hard and turned away to mount his horse. It is not that I wanted him to stay; I knew he could not. I only wanted him to feel my fear and love me in my weakness.

He promised to return in time for my lying-in, but he did not come. When my time came I gave birth to a still-born son. I will spare you the darkness of those days. It was as though my body had become the womb of death. I lay for days, empty--more empty than John or any man can know.

Constance dear, come in. Mother's resting for a bit. Come, sit near me. You must be tired, too. Bridget's sleeping? And Margaret, too? That's fine. Sleep will be a healing thing for them.

But what has happened to my Constance? Tears? What brought these tears? You're not coming down with fever, are you, child? Not fever, but something Papa said to you last night? That you were now fourteen and you must begin to think of women's work? Oh, but you

do; you help me with the house and with the babies. I don't know what I would do without you, Constance. Your father knows that.

Ah, he did not mean a woman's work in quite that way. Then, what? That in two years or so you will be married--be wife and mother for a worthy husband. . . Yes, it's true; I was only fourteen when first I met your father. But that is no reason to think that at fourteen you should be in love. You're not in love, Constance, are you? That's not what brought your tears? Ah, good. Fourteen, I think, is not quite old enough for love. Oh, I do not regret that I fell in love so young but for you I hope it does not come so soon.

Then why the tears? You fear what marriage brings. You fear what men demand. But Constance dear, when you love your husband it is not only what he demands but what you want as well. You must believe me when I say that marriage brings great joy. You must love before you understand the happiness God gives to man and woman who share their marriage vows. But it frightens you to think of bringing forth a child? You have seen my pain. . . Yes, there is pain, I grant you that. Ah, but Constance, there is also bliss: to see for the first time, to hold for the first time this perfect being springing from your body. This bliss no man can know. Not even Papa with all his honors and applause.

Now, dry your tears and do not worry about things that are still far in the future. Run upstairs like a good girl and see if Baby needs changing. And, Constance dear, when the children are all settled come down and we shall have a special supper together--just the two of us. Mulled wine and sugar cakes? Good. There that's better. That's my girl.

What else could I have said to her? It's true there is great joy in marriage. But she is so young, so young and innocent, my Constance. I look at that slim body, still lithesome like a child--and then I look at mine.

I have terrible thoughts sometimes, you know. Dark, rebellious thoughts that frighten me. Sometimes I ask God's pardon for them. But sometimes I don't! Must I ask pardon for wondering if there is no other way to live? For wondering if each year I must grow heavy with Child until I die--or until my body no longer cherishes John's seed? Is it as the preachers say "God's way for women" or have they made it women's way and called the He-God down to give it blessing?

You see, I have wild thoughts. I wonder if other women have such thoughts. Do you? Do you wonder how it is that things are as they are? I look at Constance and I dream of a life for her where she will marry where she wishes, bear children when she wishes, say yes or no according to her will. Is it so wild to hope so much? Is it blasphemous to think this might be God's will for women?

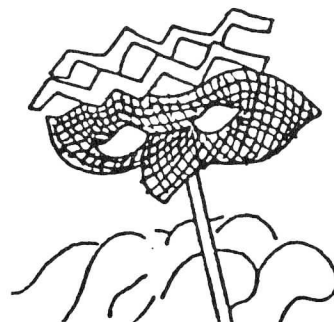
Oh, Constance, you've brought Baby down. Here, I'll take her. And Bridget is awake and feeling cooler? Oh, Constance, that's a lovely thought, to pray together that Papa's preaching will go well. You bring the children down and I'll light a candle and we'll pray together.

All right, then. Now, what shall we pray for? Yes, that Papa will preach very well this afternoon and that the Bishop will be pleased. Yes, Lucy? You want to

pray for what? You want to pray that you will be a preacher like Papa when you grow up? Oh, I'm afraid you can't do that. Why not? Well, because only men can be preachers. Why? Well, that's how it is, dear. Did God say so? Well . . . men think he did. So we must leave it to George to be the preacher. What is that? Papa says you're smarter than George? Perhaps you are but that has nothing to do with it! Goodness, Lucy, so many questions! What now? Will God change his mind some day so you can be a preacher if you're very good?

Some day. . . Some day. . . What will our children be? Some day will Constance be free to choose her husband and the times that she will be with child? Some day will Lucy preach and handle God's body? Some day. . . some day, will we--all of us--will we see the womanly face of God.

MARIA VON WEDEMEYER



Maria von Wedemeyer, fiancée of the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was just eighteen when they were engaged in February, 1943. Two months later he was imprisoned by the Nazis under suspicion of treason. Like most forthright pastors of the Evangelical Churches he had been under surveillance for some time: his seminary was closed and he had been forbidden to write or speak publicly.

He had first met Maria through her grandmother while she was still a child and he had prepared both her brothers for confirmation. Despite the disparity of their ages (he was twice her age) their attraction was strong and lasting and despite some hesitation on her mother's part, they announced their engagement.

In the photographs of Maria from this period we find a look of both tranquillity and innocence--but an innocence far from the pseudo-innocence of the stereotypical bride. Her innocence is that of steadfastness and integrity. Like the other women in *All THAT I AM* she is--despite her youth--a realist. She is graced with simplicity, directness and a natural bent to face truth squarely.

The months of Dietrich's imprisonment mature them both. He must recognize his weakness and she becomes aware of her strength. Contrary to the stereotyped image of the Bride, Maria faces Dietrich's need and rises to meet it.

THE BELOVED

Good afternoon, Lise. Thank you, that's fine. Here, let me put my gloves in the pocket. I'm always losing them and they're hard to replace these days. Frau Bonhoeffer is at home? oh, good. . . . Mother Bonhoeffer, I was afraid you might not yet be home. Yes, I know, it is earlier than I expected but they wouldn't let me stay any longer at the prison. Oh, no, nothing is wrong. Truly. Yes, yes. I saw him. He looks well.-- Yes, Lise, I would love some coffee but I hate to trouble you.

Almost a year since Dietrich was arrested. I never thought it would be so long. He didn't either. Remember, at first he would say, "Don't worry, I'll soon be out. Just a few more interrogations and I'll be out!"

Thank you, Lise, that is good! Well, no, not quite like the old days. Everything is ersatz now. You would laugh to hear Dietrich describe the prison coffee. He thinks they must make it from pine cones! Yes, please, a little more. That's fine. No, I've learned to drink it without sugar. At first all of us made faces, especially the little ones, but mother said: "Must is a good master, children." And we learned. I hardly notice any more.

Now: let me tell you about my visit. Are you ready for a surprise? I saw Dietrich without a guard being present! Yes, I did! I don't know why. No one said anything. They simply went off and left us. We spoke very low in case someone should be listening but who wants to listen to two people in love! Of course, of course. I told him you were trying to get the books he asked for. No. Oh dear, I never thought to ask what else he needed. We were silly with happiness, both of us. Have you ever seen your great learned son silly? Oh, of course we did not do anything foolish but Dietrich was happier than I have seen him for a long time.

He says he is sure they cannot keep him much longer. They can't make the charges stick unless they find more evidence--and please God that will never happen. And so we talked about our marriage. Dietrich says that as soon as he is freed we must be married. Unless, of course, he is called into the army but he says that is most unlikely. What an engagement we've had! Hardly an hour we could spend alone.

Mother Bonhoeffer, today we read together the wedding sermon Dietrich had written for Eberhard Bethge. He gave me the copy he had; I have it here. "God intends you to found your marriage on Christ. 'Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you to the glory of God' In a word, live together in the forgiveness of your sins, for without it no human fellowship, least of all a marriage, can survive. Don't insist on your rights, don't blame each other, don't find fault with each other but take one another as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts. Such is the word of God for your marriage."

You know, I felt when he was reading it to me as though it were written for us, as though we were in fact already married and these were God's blessed words to us. "Live together in the forgiveness of your sins." Once I would have thought the sins were all mine, that my fiance was a perfect man. Grandmama idolized him you know. I remember how when I was little she would take us to visit the seminary at Finkenwalde and when his book came out, THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, she would sit for hours reading it and talking to us about "cheap grace" and "costly grace."

Then we were too little to understand. But, Mother Bonhoeffer, now I do. This is costly grace God gives us now, Dietrich and me. It's changed us, you know, the months he's been in prison. He always seemed so sure; it made me feel so young and so unceertain. When there was a problem he would take it and lay it out, thinking, analyzing, until finally the distinctions came clear. It puzzled him a little that my heart was quicker than my head. But all these months of loneliness, I think they've blurred the lines, made his mind less certain, stirred something deep in him he'd never known was there.

Today before I left he gave me something, a poem he'd written. May I read it to you? It's not, well, it's not an easy poem. You'll see.

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.
Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
 Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
 Restless and longing and sick,
 Like a bird in a cage,
 Struggling for breath,
 As though hands were compressing my throat,
 Yearning for colors, for flowers, for voices of
 birds
 Thirsting for words of kindness, for
 neighborliness
 Tossing in great expectation,
 Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at
 making,
 Faint and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of
 mine,
 Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!

I cried when he read it to me. The tears felt good on my cheeks and the taste of salt in my mouth was like a sacrament. It had shattered a barrier between us: the image of the protecting man and the protected girl. Yet, poor Dieterich, as soon as he saw tears he had to stand tall again, had to tell me how fine he was, how healthy, how easy prison life was compared to those in camps and at the front. He held me in his arms and said he was sorry, so sorry, that he should not have shared the poem with me, that he wrote it just in a moment of weakness, that it meant nothing, that I should forget it. That we would never mention it again.

Poor Dietrich. And all the while those tears salted my lips and made me strong. Oh, not strong as men think they must be strong, full of muscles and sinews and great fists, but strong in truth. To say: this is how it is; this and no otherwise.

I know the loneliness he fears and suffers more in fearing. I feel his passion to be free, the anger at chains and gates and guards that shut us off from life. I understand the yearning to see domestic roses growing in a garden or dew glinting on the morning grass. I know he fears the fear of death. I know these things. How could I love and yet be spared? How could he love and hope to spare me--as though I were a child he had to send early to bed while the sky was bright, lest the darkness frighten her.

Dear Mother Bonhoeffer, now I've made you cry, too. No, no, I won't apologize. Tears are too precious to be repented of. And anyway my tears were tears of gladness. I think they made Dietrich understand that there is no point in sparing me. I am not the little girl he met in Granmama's garden; and he is not the awesome pastor who must always have the answer to the question. I have my strength as he has his.

When we are married, Dietrich and I. . . Mother Bonhoeffer! Of course, I believe we'll be married. Don't you? How can they hold him much longer? Look, just today, without a single word the guards went off and left us alone. Is that the way you would treat a prisoner who is going to be sentenced for treason? I know Dietrich sounds depressed and fearful sometimes but it is not so much for himself. It is the atmosphere. Sometimes, he says, he can hear someone crying next to him all night. Then some are taken for interrogation and are never returned. And the days are long, he says. And he is homesick. He wants to be home and make music as you all used to do. His fingers itch for his old piano.

I'm so sorry, Mother Bonhoeffer. I didn't realize how late it was. Have I made you late for the hospital? No, of course, I understand. Would you mind if I waited here? I told my brother he could find me here when he finishes his shift at work. No, this is fine. I'll wait right here. I have some things I want to read. Goodbye, Mother Bonhoeffer. Auf Wiedersehn..

For Maria

O Happiness beloved, and pain beloved in heaviness
 You went from me.
 What shall I call you? Anguish, life, blessedness
 Part of myself, my heart--the past?
 The door was slammed;
 I hear your steps depart and slow die away.
 What now remains for me--
 Torment, delight, desire?
 This only do I know:
 That with you, all has gone.
 But do you feel how I now grasp at you
 And so clutch hold of you
 That it must hurt you?

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N.B. In 1945 Bonhoeffer was executed for treason. His family was never notified and two months later Maria was still searching in prison after prison to learn news of him.

EPILOGUE: SIMON PETER'S WIFE

Well, here it is, two thousand years later but, Lord love us, I don't see that things have changed that much. There's still some of them that thinks they can walk on water!

Now that poor child you just saw. You know what happened to her, don't you? That's right, they hanged her fiance and she not even knowing where he was or when it happened. Not too different from my own Peter--I call him Peter now; might as well, everyone does. Of course, you know they killed him. The charge was treason, too, after a manner of speaking. It's always treason they get you for, no matter what they calls it. You think a little different from the others and before you can say Jack Spratt they've got you up on charges. Well, you've all got your own stories on that, I reckon.

Well, now, to get back to where we started. I don't know what you think of it all: Peter off preaching the kingdom, Augustine sending off his woman when he gets called up higher; poor Hilde and her poor husband, too, split apart like a dead tree; and little Anne Donne, such a pretty little thing, dead in childbed at thirty-three after twelve births. And now Maria.

Lord love us, it's not that I would have wanted it different. I grew to love the Lord myself, God knows, and Peter did the right thing I haven't a doubt. And yet I say the same thing now as I said then: What about me? What about us? What about all of us?

